



Bulbs

Fragrant Bulbs for Christmas

'Prepared' bulbs:

- Hyacinths
- Paper white daffs

Hyacinths

Use gloves to handle as bulbs can cause skin irritation. Plant as soon as purchased, ideally in a container with drainage holes using multi-purpose compost (no fertilizer required). Plant bulbs close together but not touching with tops of bulbs just below the surface. Water and drain. Place in black polythene bag in cool dark place. Check periodically to ensure compost hasn't dried out. When shoots 1½-2 inches bring indoors to cool room away from bright light for leaves to green up (1-2 days) then move to area with good light not over any direct heat source. Provide humidity by sitting pot on tray filled with gravel and some water – bottom of pot above water line. Support flower heads. If leaves grow at expense of flowerheads, move away from direct light for a few days. After flowering plant outdoors at twice depth of bulb.

Paperwhite daffodils

Grow in same way as hyacinths. They aren't hardy out of doors in UK so are best discarded after flowering.

Cultivation of bulbs in the Garden

The aim is to mimic the bulbs' growing conditions in the wild. Most bulbs require sun & moist soil when flowering; drier, warmer soil conditions when dormant. They benefit from feeding straight after flowering when foliage is growing; use a high potassium based fertilizer such as Tomato fertilizer.

Let bulb foliage die back naturally and do not tie up! Leaves build food supply so the bulbs will flower the following year and need to be left for at least 6 weeks after flowering.

Daffodils, Crocuses, Snowdrops, Camassia, Chionodoxa, Fritillaria meleagris, Eranthis

These bulbs are the most reliable for planting outdoors in the heavier and damper UK soil conditions. They can cope with a little shade though crocuses will not open if in shade when flowering.

Plant most at twice the depth of the bulb; slightly deeper if your soil is light and free draining; slightly shallower if soil is very heavy & wet.

Tulips

In order to flower year on year tulips need a light, free draining soil in full sun. A sunny S or SW facing bank can also work. If you can't provide these conditions, dig up and discard the bulbs after flowering or grow them in a pot.

Pot growing – Squirrel proof your pots using chickenwire

Plant deeply; at least 6" deep and cover with compost up to 2½" of top of pot. Cover with chicken wire, another 1" of compost and then a layer of grit or gravel.

Feed just after they have flowered using tomato fertilizer and after 6 weeks move the pots to a warm position close to a wall where they will receive minimal summer rainfall. In Autumn move pots back to an open position in the garden. This way you can enjoy your tulips for several seasons.

Alliums, Tritelia

These are a little different from other bulbs in that their foliage appears before the flowers and disappears as the bulbs flower.

Alliums also benefit from the removal of the seed heads as they finish flowering because the seed heads can drain the bulbs of food and diminish flowering in subsequent years.

Anemone St Brigid, Fritillaria assyrica, Iris, Puschkinia, Ranunculus, Scilla, Gladiolus

All these small bulbs do better planted in a sunny position with well drained soil – a sunny bank is ideal. Or you can work in added grit to the planting position.

They are all good for 'pot culture' – ensure pot drainage holes don't become blocked. In pots, feed straight after flowering and after foliage dies back move pots to sunny warm position close to a wall to avoid constant wetting over summer. Move back to open position in Autumn. Protect from squirrels using chicken wire.

Deadheading Bulbs

Bulbs can benefit from deadheading, although not entirely necessary (see note about Alliums). Remove only the flowerhead & seed capsule, not the green flower stalk.

Growing bulbs in pots and vine weevils

Bulbs can be particularly susceptible to vine weevil grubs – when the grubs hatch they burrow into and eat the bulbs. (small C-shaped white grubs about ½cm). If you are aware that this is a problem you either discard the bulbs each year or employ biological control

Biological Control – buy nematodes online and water onto pot soil when grubs hatch (April / May and September).

For maximum impact plant same type bulbs in a group.